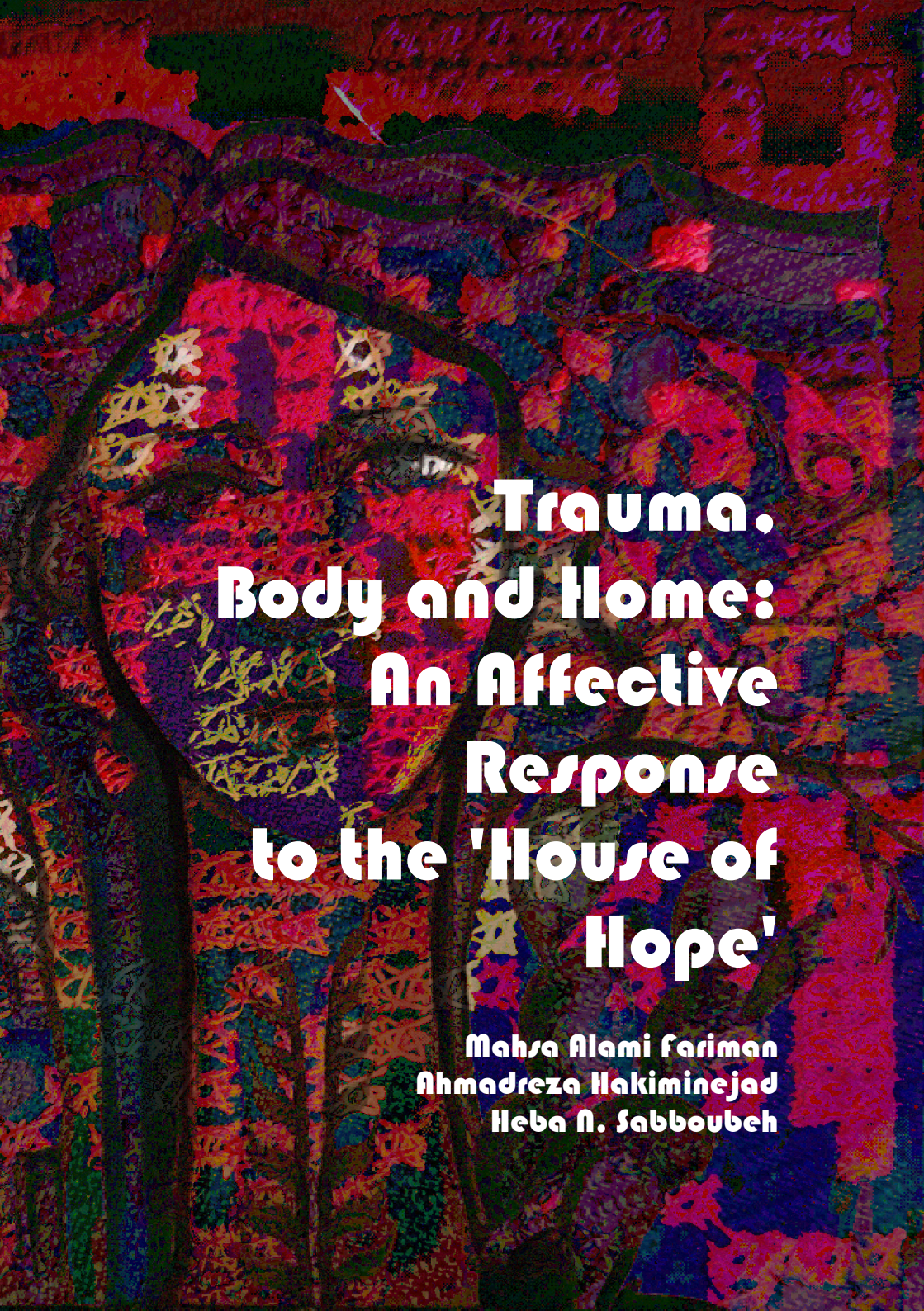

Trauma, Body and Home: An Affective Response to the 'House of Hope'

Mahsa Alami Fariman
Ahmadreza Hakiminejad
Heba N. Sabboubeh

Trauma, Body and Home: An Affective Response to the 'House of Hope', was created by Mahsa Alami Fariman (University College London), Ahmadreza Hakiminejad (Leeds Beckett University), and
Heba N. Sabboubeh (Aston University).

This work was produced as part of the British Academy Innovation Fellowship project **Multicultural Experiments in the Civic Life of a Cathedral**, led by Professor Nirmal Puwar (Goldsmiths, University of London), and supported by the British Academy Innovation Fellowship Scheme and Coventry Cathedral.

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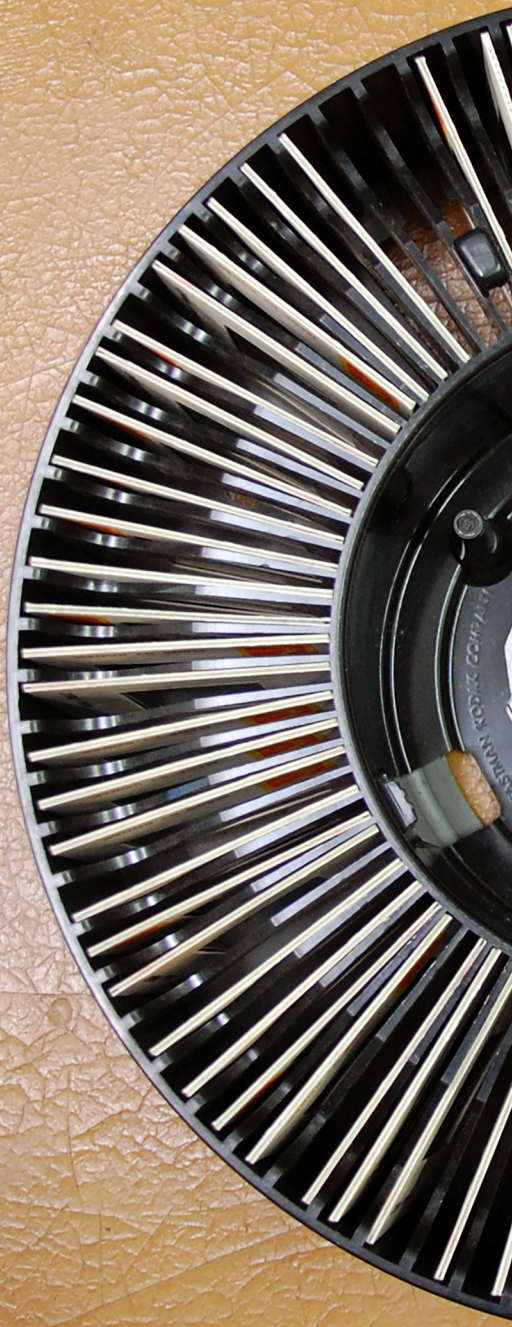

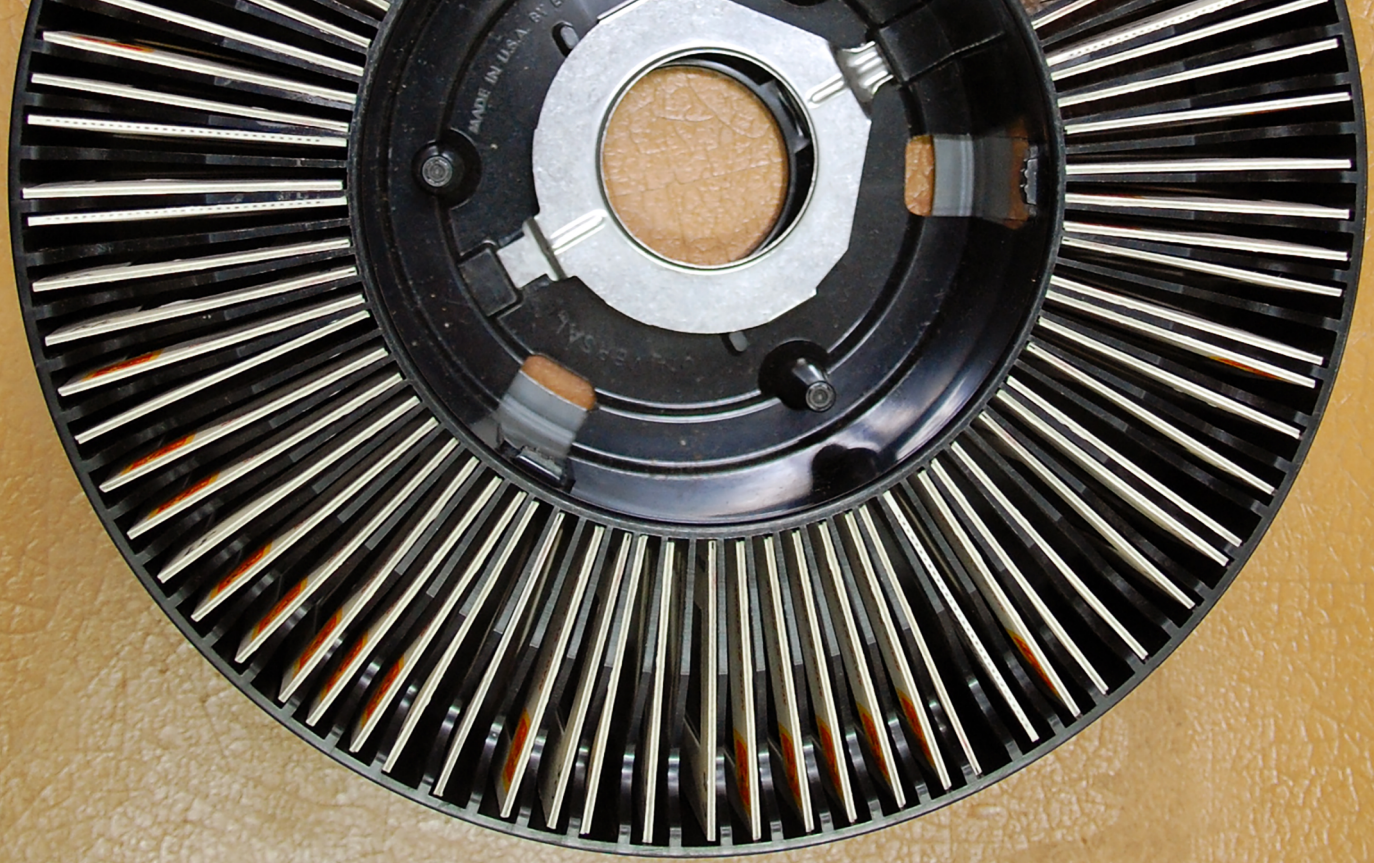

Photograph by Ahmadreza Hakiminejad, 2025. Courtesy of Coventry Cathedral Archives

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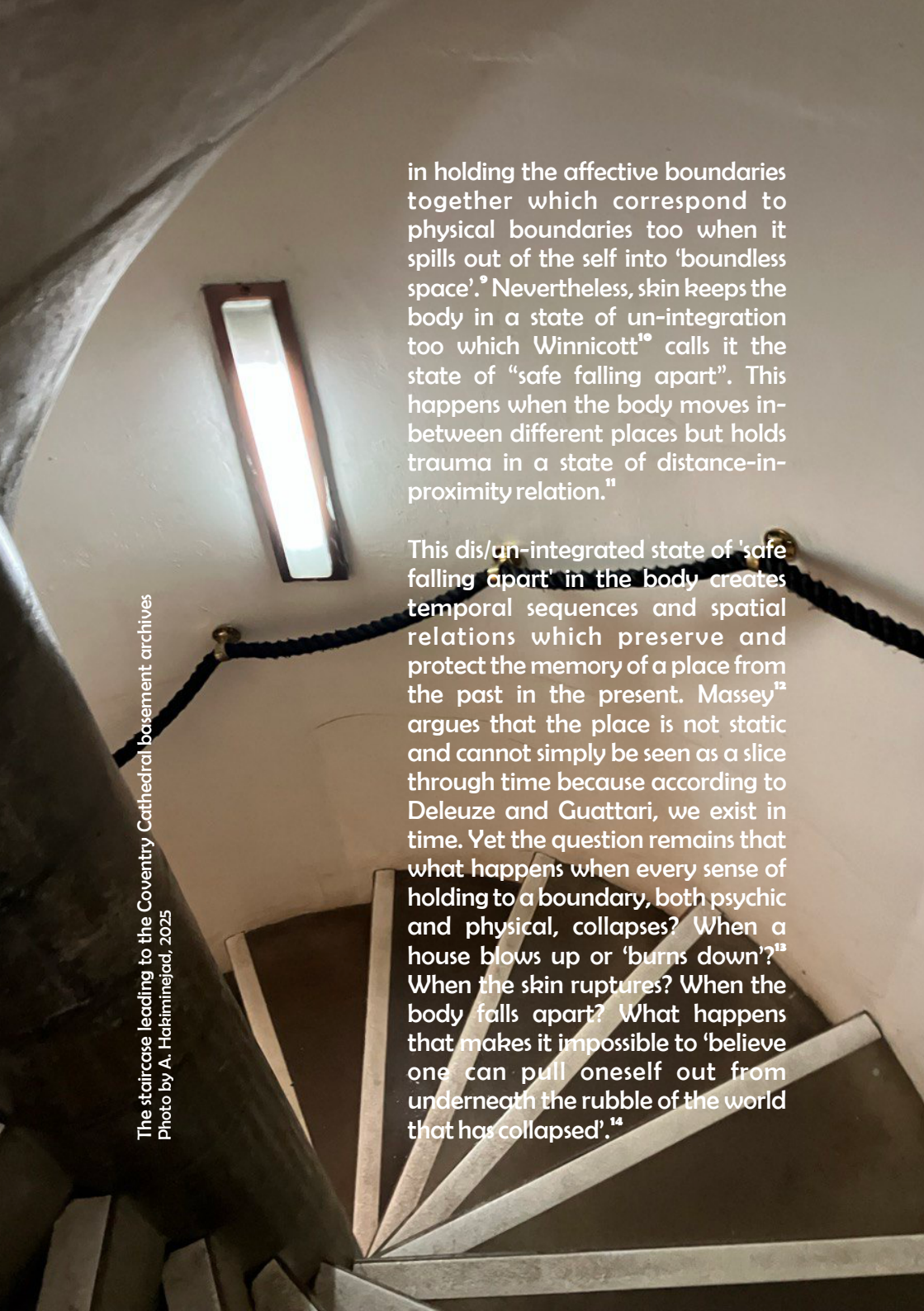
Chapter I

Trauma, Body and Home: An Affective Response to the 'House of Hope'

Mahsa Alami Fariman
Ahmadreza Hakiminejad

Trauma grows in the body. Trauma grows with the body. It shifts power and control mechanisms in the body, polices the conditions of existence and 'falls outside the formal institutions of everyday life'.[1] Trauma makes the body uninhabitable and unable to sustain life in present, strips away the baseline state of safety, manifests itself in subtle and harsh body movements[2] and embodies the pain and death that continue to be inflicted upon the body and existence.[3] Trauma keeps the memory of what was done, alive and 'changes the overall fabric of life, while you must carry on as before'.[4] Trauma dwells in the body, appropriates it through emotional and physical apparatuses, while destabilises ability to articulate 'the everyday' in which complex 'emotions, interactions, tensions, power struggles, tactics of domination and resistance and small, big, ceremonial or routine events occur'.[5] But it goes beyond that.

Trauma, in fact, changes the fabric of space around the body too, as it creates a different temporal/ spatial relation to place that is based on fear, danger, protection and safety. Walkerdine[6] mentions that 'our experience of our bodies in space is both perceptual and sensate in the phenomenological sense, but also emotional and unconscious.' In this sensational and emotional encounter with the space, skin, like a building's façade, defines a layer in-between our feelings and the space and demarcates a stable inside/ outside; a threshold that 'provides a feeling of ontological security'.[7] Skin, like the walls of a house, provides us with an affective sense of boundary; a boundary that gives us a sense of 'holding it together'.[8] As much as the wall of a house remains vulnerable to force, the affective boundary also becomes unstable when the feelings are filtered through the scars and memories of violence. This is when the body remains restless in its own skin, fragmented and disintegrated



The staircase leading to the Coventry Cathedral basement archives
Photo by A. Hakiminejad, 2025

in holding the affective boundaries together which correspond to physical boundaries too when it spills out of the self into 'boundless space'.[9] Nevertheless, skin keeps the body in a state of un-integration too which Winnicott[10] calls it the state of "safe falling apart". This happens when the body moves in-between different places but holds trauma in a state of distance-in-proximity relation.[11]

This dis/un-integrated state of 'safe falling apart' in the body creates temporal sequences and spatial relations which preserve and protect the memory of a place from the past in the present. Massey[12] argues that the place is not static and cannot simply be seen as a slice through time because according to Deleuze and Guattari, we exist in time. Yet the question remains that what happens when every sense of holding to a boundary, both psychic and physical, collapses? When a house blows up or 'burns down'?[13] When the skin ruptures? When the body falls apart? What happens that makes it impossible to 'believe one can pull oneself out from underneath the rubble of the world that has collapsed'.[14]

This pamphlet attempts to address these questions by inviting a Palestinian witness who 'uniquely speaks in the name of an inability to speak'[15]; not only of the trauma endured by other Palestinian women, but also of the trauma she bears witness to at home. The subject of trauma and home in this work is contested, because the witness and subjects are not the two faces of a single testimony here. Coventry-based academic and artist, Heba N. Sabboubeh (witness), places the truth of Palestinian trauma, the body, and the meaning of home before the 'House of Hope', as uncovered in the Coventry Cathedral archives dating back to 1978, in an effort to 'move backwards towards the present'.[16] The House of Hope, established in 1978 by Elias Jabbour—a Palestinian Christian and Arab-Israeli citizen—was 'the first Arab-initiated international peace centre' in Israel/Palestine. It is located in the Palestinian Arab town of Shefa-Amr in the Galilee region, which has been part of the Israeli state since 1948. Jabbour founded the centre with a vision for peace and reconciliation. In 1987, as part of a fundraising effort, the centre was invited to hold an event at Coventry Cathedral; itself a symbol of peace and reconciliation, having risen from the ashes after its destruction in the Blitz of November 1940. A silent testimony to this event remains: a Kodak Carousel slide tray containing 80 slides, found on a shelf in the archives located in the cathedral's basement.

The script accompanying the Kodak slide tray which includes brief descriptions for each slide, offers a testimony to what the House of Hope represented at the time, as well as how its members articulated views on contentious issues; for instance, the claim by both Jews and Arabs that the land is 'their own'. A short description accompanying one slide reads: "Arabs living in Israel have very special problems. They feel themselves to be second-class citizens." Another note, referring to the following slide titled Girls' Face, states: "They

Kodak slide, Coventry Cathedral Archives, photo by A Hakiminejad, 2025

are harassed. Their lands have been taken and confiscated, and their children suffer educational deprivation." The following slide obscurely titled 'War Vehicles' reads: "Israel is a land of conflict, not peace." This is followed by a cityscape of Nazareth, making a theological argument for peace: "Yet here in Israel, two thousand years ago, the Prince of Peace was born. Here God brought peace to man." The next slide, titled Arab Begging—which indeed depicts an Arab man begging—is accompanied by a paradoxical note that asserts a sense of hopefulness: "Are there any signs of hope today in this divided nation? Are there any models of reconciliation? Yes, there are." A mild tone is chosen throughout, focusing mainly on the condition of Arab-Israelis and their struggles within the state of Israel. Almost a decade later, Jabbour asked himself in a House of Hope newsletter published in autumn 1997: "So, if I call for peace, am I a naive man with a fading hope?", and he replied: "No, I am not." One may wonder what would his answer to that very question be today? Heba, however, is our 'witness to the truth'[17]; a Palestinian architect from Anabta (a Palestinian town located in the northern West Bank) who lived and grew up with the trauma of occupation, oppression, humiliation and death; not only during the time when the 'House of Hope' visited Coventry Cathedral, but continuing to this day, as she now works as a university lecturer in the UK.

In reading the present backward from the past and to bear witness to the truth of despair and trauma in Palestine, Heba uses a unique method of painting with a political purpose and accompanying it with a story that narrates an event which 'brings a speechlessness into words'.[18] The silence of the painting and the accompanying words are internal to the testimony itself that maintains relations with those who have lived the same trauma before and those who continue to search for a stable affective and physical boundary within

'War vehicles' (digitised), courtesy of Coventry Cathedral Archives

'Girls face' (digitised)
Courtesy of Coventry Cathedral Archives

and beyond their uninhabitable body, home and land. In this sense, she creates a new spatial relation with the subjects of her paintings as they hold together the memory of a country, a land, a town, a house and a body that experienced extreme and mundane violence by the Israeli soldiers at the time when the 'House of Hope' was presented in Coventry Cathedral. Nevertheless, her works presented in this pamphlet go beyond that, to also show how she dwells in her paintings and how the canvas turns into a new skin, a threshold, that re-configures the relations between trauma, body and home.

Dwelled in her paintings, in what follows, Heba illustrates how storytelling and remembering an event, a place, a home or a person in a political way creates a sense of historical continuity of community for her. Her dwelling in painting is a 'chain of being,' as Walkerdine[19] puts it, rather than a 'house of hope.' This pamphlet tends to offer an affective response to the House of Hope initiative; not only to expose the military and brutal violence inflicted by Israeli soldiers on Palestinian civilians in everyday life, but also to stress the importance of mending the broken chain between displaced communities and bringing them back to life through art.

Notes

1 Pilar Riaño-Alcalá and Erin Baines, "Editorial Note: Special Issue on Transitional Justice and the Everyday," International Journal of Transitional Justice 6, no. 3 (2012): 385–393.
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3 David Mwambari and Eric Sibomana, "Bodily Scars as Lived Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda," Body & Society 29, no. 3 (2023): 3–28.
4 Giorgio Agamben, When the House Burns Down: From the Dialect of Thought, trans. Kevin Attell (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2022).
5 Riaño-Alcalá and Baines, Editorial Note, 378.
6 Valerie Walkerdine, "Communal Beingness and Affect: An Exploration of Trauma in an Ex-industrial Community," Body & Society 16, no. 1 (2010): 91–116.
7 Walkerdine, Communal Beingness, 96.
8 Ibid, 96.
9 Ibid, 97.
10 D. W. Winnicott, "The Capacity to Be Alone," International Journal of Psychoanalysis 39 (1958): 416–420, quoted in Walkerdine, Communal Beingness, 97.
11 Bracha Ettinger, The Matrixial Borderspace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
12 Doreen Massey, For Space (London: Sage, 2005).
13 Agamben, When the House Burns Down, 2022.
14 Agamben, 2022.
15 Agamben, 2022.
16 Agamben, 2022.
17 Agamben, 2022.
18 Agamben, 2022.
19 Walkerdine, Communal Beingness, 2010.

'Nazareth' (digitised), Courtesy of Coventry Cathedral Archives

Chapter 2

Words and Paintings

Heba N. Sabboubeh

The Memory of a Safe Haven for an Expecting Mother in Palestine

A letter sent to my son, Adam, on his Birthday

Adam was born during the second Intifada. Around his birth date, we were living under curfew for months, and there was no accessibility to hospitals. We decided to rent a house for a month in Nablus to guarantee accessibility to hospitals when the delivery day came. We agreed with my doctor (Dr Abdulateef Daraghmeh) to induce the birth on the 8th of July 2002 to guarantee that I reach the hospital by an ambulance. The ambulance picked me up during the curfew in Nablus and Adam was born at 12.20 at Al-Ittihad (Women Union) Hospital in Nablus.

During Adam's pregnancy we were living in the family house which consisted of multiple storeys and was located on the top of a hill, my parents in law lived on the ground floor and we lived in a flat on the 1st floor. In April 2002, the Israeli army occupied our house and forced us (myself, my eldest son Kamal who was 18 months old and his father) to leave our flat and locked all of us with my parents-in-law's house, while they occupied the whole

building and prevented us even from going to our garden. We were jailed with my parents-in-law in their house for two weeks. They took all the entry point keys, our passports and mobile phones, and converted the house into a military base filled with hundreds of soldiers who parked their tanks outside the house. They chose the place specifically to watch over our town. It was the same time during the Jenin massacre in April 2002.

During these days I remember that the Israelis lifted the curfew for 2 hours and allowed only two people to leave the house (my father-in-law and Kamal's father) to do some shopping for essentials, while I was locked in the house with my mother-in-law and Kamal. During the two-hour curfew lift, I remember my father and my brothers came to check on me, but they were not allowed in by the Israeli army. I wasn't able to speak to them or see them face to face, so I just waved to them from the window and shouted 'I am OK' and they left.

21 years later, history is repeating itself again; Jenin camp is demolished, people are kicked out of their homes, innocent people are killed and tortured, and there is probably another pregnant woman somewhere in Palestine, trying to reach the hospital to deliver her baby peacefully. Writing this, I feel living the trauma again. I am sorry Palestine, I am sorry Adam for bringing up sad memories on your birthday. You and your brothers have been my absolute pleasure and always will be.

Happy Birthday my beloved, strong, resilient, handsome Adam. I love you so much.

Childhood and Home

The soldiers' boots hit the door like thunder, each strike is a brutal punctuation against the brittle quiet. Dust rattled from the old door frame, scattering like frightened insects. Behind the door, a child crouched in the shadowed corner, with small fingers clutching a worn doll, its face smudged and loved to ruin, can she hide behind her doll? Fear thickened the air of the home, drowning out the memory of laughter and games that once filled the room. It was a sound that split the world in two: before and after occupation, safety and ruin.

Growing Old at Home: Finding Peace in the Familiar

Growing old at home, finding peace in the familiar, is a bittersweet comfort that now echoes through empty rooms. Once bustling with laughter and shared memories, the house now stands silent, with only the soft murmur of birds and the rustling of growing plants breaking the stillness of the courtyard. Soldiers have come, their presence tearing families apart, forcing loved ones to flee, seeking refuge in lands far from home. The streets that once held the warmth of community are now abandoned, and those who remain find themselves aging in solitude, the weight of loss heavy on their hearts. The world outside is filled with fear and uncertainty, but here, in this quiet little town, the simple sounds of nature offer a fragile sense of peace, an echo of a life that was, and the fading hope that perhaps, amidst the loss, there can still be a place for an old soul to rest.

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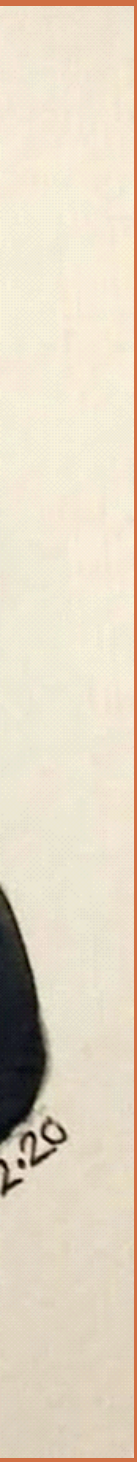

Motherhood and Home

Motherhood, at its core, is a sanctuary of love and care, where a mother's presence provides a profound sense of safety and warmth. In the face of adversity, when soldiers march through the town roads, the home becomes not just a physical space, but a sacred fortress, where a mother's protection shields her children from the harsh realities outside. The walls of the home, though fragile, stand as symbols of resilience, holding the promise of safety and nurturing. A mother's instinct to protect transcends the fear of violence, as she stands as the last line of defence, ensuring her children are wrapped in the comfort of love, even when the world outside is full of chaos and horror. Through her, the home becomes more than a place, it's a shield, a bastion of security against the world's cruelties, a certainty of shelter, and a promise of home.

And there is that old lady,

staring at a ball left forgotten in the courtyard, a quiet reminder of days long past when she was young. The once lively space, now barren and still, filled with the absence of the boys who used to play there, their laughter filling the air as they chased the ball under the watchful eye of the sun. But now, only the soft creak of the wind against the wooden gate and the distant call of birds disturbs the silence. She watches the ball, unmoving, as memories of the days when her children, now scattered and lost to the chaos of war, ran through this same yard flood her mind. The world has taken so much, leaving her alone in a place she once shared with love and life. Yet, she remains rooted to this spot, clinging to her walking stick and to the familiar, even as everything around her slips away, leaving her to grow old in the shadow of what was.

The lonely town

stands like a grieving woman, her heart heavy with the weight of loss. In the arid silence, the cactus rises as a silent testament, its thorny arms reaching skyward, proving that Palestinians have always been here, rooted in the land. The wheat fields, golden and bending in the wind, weave the threads of history, each stalk whispering stories of struggle, survival, and an enduring connection to the earth. Among the wheat, poppies bloom with fragile brilliance, their red petals honouring the martyrs, whose sacrifices are etched into the rocks. The town, though abandoned, holds its grief and its pride, its soul carried in the whispers of the wind, the rustling of the wheat, the silent promise of remembrance in every poppy that rises from the earth, and a bird's sorrowful song that lingers in the air.

Tanks rolled through, their heavy treads flattening homes that once stood proudly, pillars of comfort and history, reducing them to rubble in moments, widening the roads for many future attacks to come. The little alleys, where children once played and neighbours whispered secrets, are now wide, empty roads, echoing with the ghosts of what once was. Where once the air was filled with the sounds of life, laughter, jasmine scent in the summer nights and the warmth of familiar footsteps, now there's only the crushing weight of silence. The scars of occupation stretch across the landscape, leaving behind a hollow, unrecognisable shell of a place that once knew joy and connection. What was once intimate and full of life is now vast and desolate, the small, personal spaces lost to the relentless advance of destruction. The tanks have left more than physical marks, they've erased the very essence of home, turning vibrant streets into lifeless, deserted paths.

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The Home of the Past: What Once Was

The town was once a beautiful tapestry of nature, where flowers stretched toward the sky, their colours a vibrant swirl that surrounded every corner. The air was fragrant with their bloom, and the earth beneath seemed alive with life. Roosters crowed in the distance, their sharp calls disturbing the peaceful silence, startling a dove perched gently on her eggs. She sat still, her wings spread wide, guarding the fragile life within, as the quiet beauty of the town enveloped her. It was a place where the world moved slowly, where time was measured by the bloom of flowers and the soft murmur of nature's rhythms, it was a home of all, a home with doors that were decorated with love hearts.

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Women in Black

In Palestine, many women have endured unimaginable loss as they have witnessed the deaths of their husbands, children, and other family members due to ongoing violence and conflict. These women, often left to navigate the complexities of grief and survival, bear the weight of immense emotional and physical hardships. In addition to mourning the loss of loved ones, they face the challenges of raising children alone in an environment of instability, limited resources, and constant fear. Despite these hardships, many of these women display extraordinary resilience, working tirelessly to care for their families, preserve their cultural heritage, and advocate for peace. Their stories are not only those of loss but also of strength, courage, and an unwavering determination to rebuild their lives amidst the enduring turmoil.

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